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AUTHOR Richburg, James R.
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a working definition of educational accountability, reasons for the accountability movement in education, events and major problems. Educational accountability is a process of setting goals, making available adequate resources to meet those goals, and conducting regular evaluation to determine if the goals are met. The reasons are the influences of the federal government, the dissatisfied public and the technological-cultural difficulty of managing education. The events have moved from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which required an accounting of how federal funds were expended in compensatory education programs, to a comprehensive all-school performance contract in Gary, Indiana. The major problems are reflected in the responses to the following seven questions: Who is accountable? What is the accountability unit? How are educational outcomes measured? Will the focus on measurable student learning detrimentally affect the humanistic fields? Will accountability create a sterile environment which precludes creativity and imagination? Can accountability be applied beyond the basic skills area? Will accountability work? (Author/AWW)

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THE MOVEMENT FOR ACCOUNTABILITY IN EDUCATION

by

James R. Richburg
Department of Social Science Education
University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia

A Paper Prepared for the CUFA and NCSS Panels: "Accountability in Education: The Coming Crisis in the Social Studies"

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The Movement for Accountability in Education

Purpose of the paper. The following paper will present a working definition of educational accountability, reasons for the accountability movement in education, events in the movement for educational accountability, and major problems in the movement for educational accountability.

What is educational accountability? Wilson C. Riles (1971) defines accountability "As a process of setting goals, making available adequate resources to meet those goals, and conducting regular evaluation to determine if the goals are met [p. G-2]." Riles' broad definition of accountability can be applied to school evaluation especially with the present emphasis on formative and summative evaluation as presented by Bloom, Hastings, and Madaus (1971); however, accountability involves more than program evaluation as illustrated by the work of Scarvia B. Anderson.

Anderson (1971) while making a distinction between accountability and evaluation added a useful dimension to the definition of acccountability: "Evaluation is concerned with effectiveness . . . accountability is concerned with effectiveness and efficiency [p. K-4]." Evaluation is largely an in-shop activity while accountability involves both the evaluation process and a dimension of outside responsibility as to the effectiveness of the program under evaluation. With these considerations in hand, the following working definition of accountability is offered.

A working definition of accountability. Accountability is a construct describing the product of an educational process in which an instructional program is assessed as to its effectiveness and efficiency in achieving student learning, and educators are held responsible for the failures and successes of the instructional program.

Basic assumptions underlying the definition are as follows:

1. Student learning is the product of the instructional process.
2. Failure to achieve student learning is as much the responsibility of the school as the home and other extraneous factors.
3. Accountability involves punitive and reward mechanisms.

Discussion of the basic assumptions. Educators will not argue that student learning should be the product of instruction; however to say that the measure of good instruction is student learning leads to a listing of reasons why many children are uneducable. Lessinger (1970a) argues that this is not the point:

> "The point is rather to serve clear notice on the schools that society expects all its children to learn at least the basic skills, that failures are regarded less as the failure of the child or his background than of the school, and that proper response to failure is not excuses but reforms, and in this case reform by the school [p. 30]."

To speak of educator accountability without mention of rewards or punitive actions is rhetorical. There can be no accountability without effective mechanisms of improving instruction and student learning even if it means dismissal of the ineffective instructional personnel.

Reasons for the Accountability Movement

Authors' perceptions of the antecedents in the movement for educational accountability vary; however most articles include federal government influence, a dissatisfied public, education of poverty children as a priority of public school education, and a tendency to look at education in terms of cost effectiveness (Barro, 1971; Lessinger, 1970a and 1970b). For organizational purposes this paper will treat the antecedents to the movement for educational accountability in three categories: federal government influence, dissatisfied public, and technological cultural influences.

Federal government influence. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 placed an evaluation requirement on local education agencies to report the progress of compensatory educational programs to the state government and the United States Office of Education. As Dyer (1970) has carefully pointed out, this was not an accountability measure but rather an accounting procedure for there were no guidelines concerning corrective or punitive feedback that the local education system would receive based on its own evaluation. The motive behind

the evaluation requirement was clear; legislators wanted an accounting of how monies for compensatory education were being spent and what results they were getting. The application of accounting was applied primarily to Title programs and not to the Head Start and Follow Through Programs. The evaluation scheme in these programs was that of a national organization making an assessment of the program results.

OEO policy today reflects an amalgamation of the above two approaches. Local educational agencies are held accountable for making an internal evaluation of federally funded programs, usually through the funding of a staff evaluator position, and an external evaluation through an outside independent evaluator. The internal and external reports are submitted annually and provide an accounting of the degree to which the program met its stated goals. Implicit in the system is the threat of failure to be refunded if the goals are not sufficiently met.

In addition to the formal reporting of federally funded programs, the use of Policy Advisory Committees made up of parents of the target population has served as an accountability measure with federal programs. Parents serving on the boards are aware of program objectives, the means of program implementation, the expenditures allocated for the program, and they see the result of the program on their own children. The parental involvement of these programs facilitate another aim of the Office of Education--that of increasing community and school responsiveness to each other in poverty areas, while at the same time creating an accountability situation.

Dissatisfied public. In 1960, 11 per cent of school bond issues in the nation were rejected by the voters. In 1965 the percentage had increased to 33 per cent, and during the 1969-70 school year the percentage reached 52 per cent. During the 1969-70 school year New York state suffered 120 school budget defeats. In California 9,000 teaching positions were eliminated while enrollment climbed by 100,000 students this school year. In Michigan this school year, 4,480 teachers and 248 administrators were not rehired by local school boards (Berke, 1971).

On November 10, 1971 CBS News reported the third failure of a school levy in Independence, Missouri against the imminent threat of

closure of the schools. Taxpayers interviewed expressed the sentiment that the schools would have to operate on their present level of funding or seek additional monies from sources other than property taxes.

As Stanley Elam (1971) has pointed out, the schools form a stationary target for "embittered taxpayers and jaundiced social critics [p. 1]." However, rejection of school levies, whether based on a dissatisfaction with the schools or a dissatisfaction with heavy taxation, have the same result--less money. Schools are forced to demonstrate that they are utilizing their present level of funding to its maximum utility, and are forced to engage in cost effectiveness analysis to assess what portions of the school program stays and what portions are deleted.

Data related to attitudes of the "public" toward accountability and performance contracting are available from the third annual survey of the public's attitude toward the public schools which was conducted by George Gallup for Kappan. Gallup (1971) reported in the September 1971 issue of Kappan that 49 per cent of the sample interviewed favored performance contracts in the public schools while 28 per cent opposed such contracts. The balance of the national sample, 23 per cent, had formed no opinion on performance contracting.

In a question posed to solicit responses concerning the employment of managerial experts to review cost of educational programs and goals, 54 per cent of the sample were in favor, 31 per cent were opposed, and 15 per cent had no opinion.

Assessing the public's attitude to achievement testing in the public schools and the comparison of the test results with other schools and communities, 70 per cent of the public were in favor, 21 per cent opposed, and 9 per cent had no opinion.

The interpretation of the Gallup poll appears to be a public favorable to the idea of holding schools accountable for student learning as evidenced by its approval of the comparative use of achievement testing, the use of managerial assessment of educational costs, and the tentative acceptance of outside commercial firms operating performance contracts in the schools.

Another factor which has not received sufficient research emphasis is the relationship between the public's expectations of the public schools and teacher militancy. Even couched in a list of demands for the improvement of schools, a demand for salary increases takes precedent in the parents' minds over the other demands. Teacher strikes and walkouts are viewed as wage demands rather than demands to improve the educational program for their children. Is there a correlation between teacher militancy and public support of the schools? This writer would hypothesize that there is.

A warning is in order at this point. There is a tendency in all articles about accountability to generalize to the public's wanting accountability in education. It should be noted that not one article in print, of which this writer is aware, was written by a member of the laity. There are interpreters of public opinion, paraphrasers of parents' dissatisfaction, but these are made by advocates of accountability. At the numerous conferences on accountability, parents have not been represented as have teachers, administrators, performance contractors, and board members.

Indeed the cultural truism of the school performing an enculturation function has been strangely silent, and educators have been forced to guess how the society wants its children to behave after 12 years of schooling. As Campbell (1971) has pointed out schools have been only too willing to attempt to meet all the physical and social needs of children with the possible exception of sex as a result of the vague directives from the public. A positive result of the accountability movement may lie in the schools and communities jointly defining just what it is the schools are supposed to accomplish.

Technological-cultural influences. The literature on accountability is filled with system analysis jargon, pentagonese, and management terminology. Lessinger (1970a) writes of educational engineering, developmental capital, and educational auditing. Barro (1970) calls for revolutionizing school management through output-oriented management methods. The concepts and terminology are emerging as if educational accountability was

struggling to achieve discipline status, and perhaps meta-accountability will develop to provide an analysis of the accountability movement, and the impact of the new terminology and techniques on traditional educational practices.

Mark R. Shedd (1971), Superintendent of the School System of Philadelphia, illustrates the traditional system of educational accounting with the following statements:

> "Public school systems have developed extremely precise methods of accounting; most can tell you to the penny how much they spent for teachers' salaries, textbooks, red and blue litmus paper, and the wax on the gymnasium floor. But they cannot tell you what this investment produced. Our focus in educational accounting has been on input, not output . . . . Per-pupil expenditures do not really tell us what it costs to educate a student; all they tell us is what it costs to keep a student seated for a year [p. D-3]."

As educational budgets have come under pressure from reluctant taxpayers, school administrators have been forced to borrow cost effectiveness systems from the economic sphere. When cost analysis is paired with student learning, it is possible to evaluate programs to determine which program yielded the most results, i.e., student learning, for the fewest dollars.

The work of Bloom and associates in identifying various levels of cognitive thought process, and the work of Mager and Popum in developing techniques for specifying instructional objectives have contributed to the technological influences on American education and the accountability movement.

Events in the Movement for Educational Accountability

Dyer (1971) has managed to trace an accountability precedent back to 1647 "when the Great and General Court of Massachusetts Bay Colony enacted what the history books refer to as the Old Deluder Satan Law [p. I-1]." Other writers will no doubt discover precedents in the Classical Age of Greece or at least in the Industrial Revolution. For the purposes of this paper, the first major event in the accountability movement was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which required the

accounting procedure previously discussed. The ensuing policy of external and internal evaluation also served as a catalyst for the movement to educational accountability.

The next major event to follow the ESEA of 1965 was the Texarkana Performance contract in 1969. The Texarkana program was negotiated under the auspices of Leon M. Lessinger, who at that time was the Associate Commissioner of Education. The performance contract marked the first time a public school system had contracted with a private company for academic instruction; the first use of a management support group in the public schools; and the first use of a separate rapid learning center to measure cost effectiveness of the program (Lessinger, 1970b).

The Texarkana program received national wide publicity during its implementation phases; however, it received equally bad press when the discovery was made that test items had been written into the programed materials.

Another major event in the accountability movement was the performance contract in Gary, Indiana which involved a performance contractor taking over the total school program in one elementary school. The performance contract let in April 1970 involved the largest contract in the history of accountability, $2,000,000; more responsibility, an entire school, and a longer period of time, four years (Mecklenburger and Wilson, 1971).

Although the Gary program was designed to offer the full elementary school curriculum, by Christmas of the 1970 school year only math and reading were being taught.

A fourth major event in the accountability movement has been the OEO Voucher Experiment in which pilot studies have been conducted in Seattle; Alum Rock, California; San Francisco; and Rockland, Maryland (Newsnotes, Kappan, 1971). The pilot studies were designed to gauge public feelings toward the voucher plan, to develop a community acceptance of the plan, and to implement that voucher system next year. The voucher plan will entail offering parents vouchers which students may exercise at one of several participating schools. The voucher

approach in accountability relies on consumer and market principles in which the school must produce in a competitive market.

Summary. The events in the movement for accountability have moved from the ESEA of 1965 which required an accounting of how federal funds were expended in compensatory educational programs, to a limited performance contract in Texarkana, to a comprehensive all-school performance contract in Gary, Indiana, and finally to a proposed consumer-market system in several large school systems.

Major Problems and Questions in the Movement for Educational Accountability

The following section will pose major problems and questions in the accountability movement which are still unanswered and in need of continued discussion and experimentation.

Question 1. Who is accountable? Stocker (1971) warns that the public school teacher will be the educational scapegoat of the 70's. If the teacher is held accountable for educational results without adequate resources and supervision, Stocker's warning may be realized. Can accountability be focused on the building principal as suggested by Wildavsky (1970) without giving the principal autonomy in selecting his instructional staff, relieving him of clerical administrative duties, and indeed in retraining the administrator as an instructional leader. Can accountability follow the mode suggested by Barro and Dyer (1970) that each person's contribution to the educational process be assessed. And finally can collective accountability as presented by the much herald New York City contract with the American Federation of Teachers be operationalized.

Question 2. What is the accountability unit? This question may be answered with the determination of who is accountable. Will teachers be responsible for individual student learning or will increasing the class mean suffice. Can principals boast of an increase in the mean of all classes under his supervision or will he be held accountable for the class that did not meet the norm.

Question 3. How are educational outcomes measured? In the basic skills area, will standarized tests be used. Will the results be compared to school norms, school district norms, state norms, regional norms, or national norms. What role will the person being held accountable play in the evaluation scheme. How will problems of test validity and reliability be handled.

Question 4. Will the focus on measurable student learnings detrimentally affect the humanistic fields? Is the performance contract in Gary with its stress on reading and math symptomatic of accountability results. Will education take on a factory line mentality with specified performance objectives, programed learning, and system managers for teachers?

Question 5. Will accountability create a sterile environment which precludes creativity and imagination? This question has application to both students and teachers. Students in an accountability system must learn certain tasks and demonstrate their knowledge on educational measurements. Will there be room for individual initiative, creativity in such an environment? Can teachers introduce new programs that might not have the same learning outcomes as measured by the accountability test? Will test content validity come full circle in which the instructional program must meet the content of the test rather than the test measuring the content of the instructional program.

Question 6. Can accountability be applied beyond the basic skills area? If accountability was applied to reading and mathematics, could high school teachers reap the benefits of better reading students without sharing in the responsibility of producing such a student. This appears to be doubtful, for accountability programs will primarily be implemented from outside the school, and it will be administratively more feasible to place an accountability measure on all teachers rather than a select few--not to mention professional ethical problems.

Question 7. Will accountability work? As illustrated by the events in the movement for educational accountability, accountability strategies are being tested. The results are largely still unknown, but the popular appeal of holding schools responsible will continue to serve as a catalyst

for educational accountability. However, one thing is for sure: if educators react only to the external pressure for accountability and do not internalize the need for accountability, then it will not work, and most likely public school education will continue not to work for a large number of American children.

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